

Lockdown

by

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(Characters:

ERNIE MORRIS African American (Female age late 30's-early 40's). A writer who authored a successful book, now suffering intense writer's block. She started out as an actress. She tries to present an "in control" exterior. Usually, she succeeds.

JAMES "HAKEEM" JAMERSON (WISE) African American (Male age 62) is a fast talking, youthful man who was a street hustler and maintains that energy. He has been incarcerated for 46 years. A father figure, mentor, and friend to many of the youngsters in prison.

CORRECTION OFFICER MCHENRY (Male age mid 20's) MCHENRY is a new C.O. Working at the prison. Feeling his oats as "the man in charge." He grew up in a scenario where he could have gone the way of the people he is policing now. He chose to follow in the family tradition and go into law enforcement.

CLUE African American (Male age early 18-20) is from a broken home. He has been in and out of the system since young. He has a sense of responsibility for his younger brother and has tried as best possible to parent him. He has spoken word/rapper talent. In another life, he might be an aspiring writer in an MFA program or a music star.)

(Script Notes: (/) is a suggestion for where cutoffs can occur. It means the lines should be stepped on or overlap. (Beat) does not necessarily mean an actual pause. It means there is an internal shift in thought process or energy. In general, the best pacing is fast with little to no spaces between lines, except for when emotionally necessary. Those moments should be the exception.)

ACT 1

SCENE 1

(In the dark - music.)

(The opening stanza of David Jassy's "FREEDOM" (LYRIC)

"This song is dedicated to everybody incarcerated now. Everybody locked up worldwide.)

(They got me dressed in a paper suit, shackled on the grey goose, looking out the window, wishing I could cut these chains loose.")

(The 4 actors walk out single file during the song and as the song morphs to a short selection from the rap section later on in that same song, THEY turn one by one to face the audience as if in a line up. A light bounces from face to face of each actor.)

(The loud SLAM of a Prison gate. THE 3 men either leave the stage or stay on stage somehow in character. In the Rattlestick production, the actors all stayed on stage the whole time, the ends of scenes were punctuated by a loud buzzing sound like the buzz that accompanies the door unlocking. Also, Ernie, stayed on the sidelines watching all of the action, except for the scenes when she was in her apartment, which was just off to the side. The play takes place in her memory and so it is up to the director how realis)

(ERNIE, walks forward to face the audience. SHE is dressed in black pants and an (approved color) top.)

ERNIE

(A beat as she takes in the audience and pinpoints her beginning.)
Synchronicity is the theory that coincidences play an important role in our lives in a meaningful way. Like this: Something happens. You think, "Huh, that's curious." You're intrigued, so you follow the thread blindly, and then this happens, and then that happens, and when you look back at some point, you see that life can be as messy as it can be neat. It's as mysterious as it is clear. And what you think something is, is not all that it is, and sometimes, it's not what it is at all. When you follow the thread back, you learn that wishes don't always come true. There is no guarantee that just because you wish so hard for something to be different... When you follow the thread back, if you look closely... you have to look closely....

(She enters the security section of a prison -- The CORRECTION OFFICER (C.O.) MCHENRY (African American, male young late 20's-early 30's) in uniform, his gun is in his holster. HE checks ERNIE'S ID carefully.)

(He looks at it then at her, back and forth, a few times to make sure. He flips through the pages of her notebook to check and see if she's hidden anything in the pages.)

MC HENRY

Hold on to your ID. You can't leave without it.
(handing her a ledger)

Sign here. Date and Time. You'll have to sign out when you leave, if you don't, prison goes on a lockdown while we instigate a search.

ERNIE

Wow. Okay.

(SHE signs the ledger.)

MC HENRY

(pointing)
Roll up that sleeve.

(SHE does. He stamps her arm. SHE looks questioningly at the C.O.)

(continuing)
It's invisible. You'll put it under the black light when you leave./

ERNIE

Oh./

MC HENRY

All you have with you is that notebook and pen?

ERNIE

Yes. That's all I/

MC HENRY

Okay. Keep your ID out!

(HE stands at a gate with her. It buzzes and opens. They walk through. It SLAMS shut.)

MC HENRY

(continuing)

ID.

(He points to a high security window)

(SHE holds her license up for the guard in the window to see. WE hear another buzz.)

(The second gate opens. They walk through. It SLAMS shut.)

(MCHENRY leads ERNIE to a small room. HE points to a chair. SHE sits. HE stands in front of her. HE may be perched on a table. HE holds the list of rules in his hands, but it's clear, he's memorized a lot of it. HE speaks at breakneck speed choosing peculiar moments to emphasize points. HE barrels through, but may check the list he's reading from. For most of the part, he does not stop for ERNIE's lines. ERNIE is surprised at the volume of information, utter seriousness, but lack of intent with which it is being delivered. SHE starts out trying to take notes, but abandons that.)

MC HENRY

(continuing)

Always leave your purse wallet and unnecessary belongings at home or locked in your vehicle. Okay?/

ERNIE

Okay.

MC HENRY

/You may not bring in cigarettes lighters matches cell phones. It is a felony to bring firearms pocketknives deadly weapons explosives liquor narcotics or drugs/

ERNIE

Aren't narcotics drugs?

MC HENRY

Excuse me?

ERNIE

Narcotics. Never mind.

MC HENRY

You may NOT bring neither narcotics nor drugs into a facility where state prisoners are located. Do you understand?

ERNIE

Yes.

MC HENRY

Alright. So you're supposed to be a writer?

ERNIE

Supposed to be.

(HE doesn't get it. In fact, his sense of humour is not the greatest.)

MC HENRY

Are you here to write about this prison?

ERNIE

No/Excuse me, I have a question.

MC HENRY

Because if you are here to...A question?

ERNIE

How long does it usually take to get cleared to volunteer here?

MC HENRY

(this is a new one)
What do you mean?

ERNIE

I mean, does it usually take weeks, or months, or years?

MC HENRY

It shouldn't take longer than two weeks to a month. Ms. Morris, what is your point?

ERNIE

Nothing. Just curious. Because it took a while for me. Never mind.

(Beat)

MC HENRY

...Like I was saying, you are only cleared to volunteer, if at some point, you decide to write something about this prison, you will have to get special clearance.

ERNIE

But I am not planning on writing... anything! I mean, I am not writing about/

MC HENRY

That's fine! Like I said, you're cleared and if you change your mind, you have to follow the protocol. Alright, that's enough, let's continue. Anything you give an inmate is contraband. Therefore, you may not give an inmate anything. Some items are obvious such as guns and knives etc... but some may not be, such as chewing gum/

ERNIE

Chewing gum?!

MC HENRY

Chewing gum could jam up a lock. Okay, now regarding the clothing you may wear/

ERNIE

The email explained/

MC HENRY

(He keeps talking)

No blue denim no logos no sweatsuits. Women may not wear miniskirts no low cut sleeveless or see through blouses no overly tight pants no overly tight or cropped shirts, no open toed shoes!

ERNIE

Sir, I got the email with the wardrobe advice.

MC HENRY

Ms. Morris, it's not advice. You will not be permitted to enter if you're not dressed appropriately.

(HE looks at her intently.)

There are men in here who have not been...close to a woman in quite a while. As you walk across the yard, their eyes will be following you. They will be interested in you! Do you understand? They *will* be interested in you!

ERNIE

Okay.

MC HENRY

Did you get that?

ERNIE

I most certainly did, Sir!

(he does not catch her sense of humor)

Yes. Thank you.

MC HENRY

You may not give anything to an inmate. You may not take with you anything that an inmate gives you. You are not allowed to bring *anything* from the outside to share with them. Not a peppermint, not a cookie, not a piece of fruit, nothing.

ERNIE

I think you covered this already?

MC HENRY

I did not! I said you may not bring in anything and now I am specifically talking about food. Do not give inmates your personal address or phone number.

ERNIE

This is a long list.

MC HENRY

Ms. Morris, it is important that you are advised of this institution's rules and regulations and that you understand that there will be serious consequences if you don't adhere to them, and I would like verbal confirmation right now that that is clear before I continue.

ERNIE

Very clear.

MC HENRY

Alright, never walk in front of an inmate. Walk behind or beside them.

ERNIE

Why?

MC HENRY

They could grab you from behind and hold you hostage and this is a no hostage zone. We do not guarantee your safety. Okay?

ERNIE

Okay.

MC HENRY

Don't run on the premises! Running looks like trouble or danger up in the gun towers.

(HE stops looks at her to make sure she understands. SHE nods back.)

(continuing)

So don't run. Walk! Okay, we're winding down now.

ERNIE

Thank God./Just kidding.

MC HENRY

Finally... do not engage in any intimate form of physical contact with any of the inmates. Displays of affection are NOT allowed! For instance, hugging. Hugging will be cause for immediate termination of your volunteering activities. Overfamiliarity is not permitted. IT WILL NOT BE TOLERATED!

ERNIE

My goodness! Okay, I understand.

MC HENRY

Do you agree to follow these guidelines?

ERNIE

Okay. I mean, yes, I do.

MC HENRY

Good. You are meeting Wise today/ He should be waiting for you.

ERNIE

Wait. No. I'm supposed to be meeting a man named James...

(she checks the front page of her notebook)

Hakeem/

MC HENRY

His name is James, but everyone calls him Wise.

ERNIE

Oh. Okay. Are you allowed to give me information about/

MC HENRY

About what?

ERNIE

Him. Who he is, or is there anything I should know?

(Beat)

MC HENRY

I... don't think so. Like what?... No!

ERNIE

Never mind.

MC HENRY

(reading)

Thank you for volunteering. The men really appreciate it.

ERNIE

Thank you. I mean, you're welcome.

(MCHENRY hands her a whistle on a ribbon.)

MC HENRY

Here's your whistle.

(SHE immediately blows into it)

DON'T!

ERNIE

Oh shit!/ Oh God! I'm Sorry.

MC HENRY

(speaking into walkie talkie)

False alarm! Clear.

(to Ernie)

Don't do that again!

ERNIE

I'm sorry.

MC HENRY

Follow me.

(Lights cross to,)

SCENE 2

(MCHENRY leads ERNIE across the yard. They pass CLUE who is in the yard oblivious to them. HE is composing a rap.)

CLUE

"IT'S THAT I BEEN REELING AND SPITTIN REVEALING MY
DEALINS WHILE KNEELING ON THE PAVEMENT AND HATING
THAT I'M KNEELING ON THE CONCRETE...HATING THAT I'M
KNEELING ON THE PAVEMENT WRISTS IN CUFFS AIN'T NO
BLUFF, YOU THINK YOU'RE...AIN'T PRAYING THOUGH AINT
SAYING NUTTIN' BOUT NO OBEYING THOUGH NO CHANGING,
YOU CAN'T CHANGE ME, NO, NONE OF US BE PLAYING YO"/

(The C.O.and ERNIE enter a room with tables and chairs. Some of them mismatched. JAMES HAKEEM JAMERSON "WISE" is wise as his nickname suggests. He is an intelligent, intuitive, wiry, street smart, passionate, fast talking, quick witted man. HE is dressed in perfectly pressed prison blues - his dark blue jeans say the word "P.R.I.S.O.N.E.R." in yellow block letters spelled down the front of his right leg. He may wear a light grey knit hat. HE sits at one of the tables reading a newspaper. As they approach, he looks up, studies ERNIE then dismisses her and continues reading.)

MC HENRY

Hey, Wise.

WISE

Yeah.

MC HENRY

This is/

ERNIE

Hi, I'm Ernie Morris and I'm here to/

WISE

No way! You're Ernie Morris?

ERNIE

I am.

(MCHENRY turns and starts to leave)

WISE

Wait a minute, hold up, who's she getting her ride from?

(MCHENRY turns back around.)

MC HENRY

(to Wise)

Good looking out.

(to Ernie)

You are not permitted to escort yourself out. When you're ready to leave, Officer Kaplan up front will get me or someone to escort you.

ERNIE

Ride? But we just walked.

WISE

We call it a ride.

ERNIE

Oh.

MC HENRY

Also, if you need to go to the restroom while you're here ask Officer Kaplan to unlock the bathroom door for you. He can stand guard outside if you'd like/

ERNIE

You are very thorough.

MC HENRY

Thank you. Alright then.

(HE leaves.)

(WISE and ERNIE shake hands. At some point, he will gesture she should sit.)

ERNIE/WISE

Nice to meet you/

WISE

Sorry/you first.

ERNIE

Sorry. No you, please, you go first.

WISE

Cool. My name is James Hakeem Jamerson, but you can call me Wise. Everybody else does.

ERNIE

Ernie Morris, nice to meet you.

WISE

Man, all this time I've been thinking you was a man. I seen your name on the list of new volunteers, in fact, I was the first one to sign up with you, because... Wait a minute, are you the same Ernie Morris that wrote a book called "The Refrigerator Man"?

ERNIE

Yes.

WISE

Okay, because I read your book.

ERNIE

Really?

WISE

Yeah.

ERNIE

Why did you think I was a man? My bio and picture are there.

WISE

I figured, but they only let us have paperback books, and this one didn't have no back cover, I guess somebody thought you look cute, tore it off to keep for they own purposes. It didn't have no picture no bio no nothing, so when I seen you walking in here I say to myself, "she must be here for somebody else." Ernie's about the funniest name I ever heard on a woman.

ERNIE

My Dad named me after my Grandfather, and they didn't think they'd have another child because my mom... anyway, to make a long story short, I have a younger brother.

WISE

They name *him* after your Grandmother?

ERNIE

No, but that would have been the right thing to do.

WISE

You want some coffee?

(She sits.)

ERNIE

No. Thank you.

WISE

I'ma get me some.

(calling)

JOHN DOE, boil me some water please?

(to Ernie)

They let us use hot pots for hot water or cooking.

ERNIE

Cooking? You cook here?

WISE

There's only so many variations of pressed chicken with nasty sauce a person can tolerate. Most of us cook our own food.

ERNIE

What do you cook?

WISE

I start with buttnekked noodles, then I throw in/

ERNIE

What is that?

WISE

Ramen noodles from those soup packages. Without the spice it's butt nekked, you can throw in your mackerel, onion powder, a little dry red pepper. If I'm lucky, and I got a piece of tomato, I'll marinate the mackerel first.

ERNIE

Mackarel?

WISE

You get the most meat in the package. Salmon, chicken, tuna give you stingy amounts. What I cook is better than what they usually serving in Chow hall.

ERNIE

I'm sure. So, what exactly are you looking for my help with? We should probably make sure we're a fit.

WISE

I guess I should explain, huh?

ERNIE

That would be helpful.

WISE

You kinda direct, ain't you? Some people are more chatty, take they time, this and that, Hi, the weather, Blip Bloop Blap. You get straight to the point.

(An Alarm.)

Uh oh.

(WISE gets up quickly, and moves to a door or window and looks out. ERNIE stands to join him.)

ERNIE

What's happening?

WISE

Stay there!

(ERNIE sits. WISE stands at the door surveying carefully.)

(to himself)

Man, that's not nothing. These fools. Look at that. Somebody cough, alarm. Look at that! Look at that!

VOICE OFF STAGE

False. Clear.

(WISE returns, shaking his head and sits across from ERNIE.)

ERNIE

Everything okay?

WISE

If stupidity's okay, it's okay.

ERNIE

What happened?

WISE

Some of these C.O's don't know what they doing.
False alarm.

JOHN DOE V.O.

Water's ready!

(WISE pours hot water into a plastic brown cup filled with hot water, there is a jar of instant coffee, and a little baggie or container that has sweetner packets inside. As conversation continues he mixes his coffee and drinks.)

For instance, that C.O. Who brought you here? McHenry, he seem cool, but he got a few sides to him depending on which side of the bed he wake up on. I think maybe he got some personal issues, can't keep no woman, who knows. He is very tightened up.

ERNIE

I noticed.

WISE

Yeh, he new on the job, trying to stay in control, and never heard of the word relaxation. Rookies like him get here, we waiting to find out who gon' be a supercop, and who gon' be cool. Hey, I got your book in my cell. Will you sign it for me?

ERNIE

Sure.

WISE

Now, that is something I will surely treasure. Soon as I seen your name on the list... I start thinking imagine if you wrote about me. Man, that would be the greatest moment of my life. You! Writing about me!

ERNIE

I'm not here to write/

WISE

The way you write about people makes me feel like I know them from the inside out/

ERNIE

Thank you. So, I'm eager to find out/ what it is you want my help with.

WISE

Cat come to fix the refrigerator and boom! I know when he showed up to work that day, he had no idea he was going to a writer's house who was gon' put his whole life on front street. You hustled all the details about him juggling his 5 girlfriends and 26 children, and my man wasn't but 32. 32! And didn't nobody know nothing about nobody. 26 children!

ERNIE

With three more on the way. But anyway/

WISE

Some of the youngsters in here don't read too tough. So I read some of it it to them. That part where you said, wait a minute, let me remember, okay...yeh, "The mathematical precision with which he organized his life and schedule to accommodate all of his women and his children shows the unrecognized, untapped, innate genius that resides in so many"

ERNIE

You memorized that?

WISE

Yeh, and other parts too. What you was saying is that intelligence and education are not the same thing and that's what I'm always telling the youngsters in my program. Just 'cause you from the hood don't mean you not capable of/

ERNIE

I'm really amazed that you got that!

(WISE does not take this comment kindly.)

WISE

Why? 'Cause you don't think I'm intelligent enough to understand what you was trying to say?/

ERNIE

What? Oh, no no no, I didn't mean to imply/

WISE

You think that just 'cause I'm locked up and you prolly got your PHD/

ERNIE

I didn't mean any/offense.

WISE

Just because most of us men in blue only got a
"Masters of the Hood" don't mean we dumb.

ERNIE

But I *don't* think you're dumb!

WISE

Whatever your low expectations may be, we ain't gon'
meet them.

ERNIE

Let *me* speak now, Okay!? First of all, don't tell me
what I think. That really pisses me off. You don't
know what I think. What I said sounded condescending
and I didn't mean for it to. It came out wrong. And
I'm sorry. I know that education and intelligence
are two different things, that's what I was trying
to say in my book/

WISE

And that's why I was surprised/

ERNIE

So, let me know if you still want my help. Because,
I can ask Officer Kaplan to call my *ride*, and I'll
leave but it won't be because of my *low*
expectations. How can I have any expectations? We
just met. I haven't formed an opinion about you yet.
And I'm a little insulted you managed to form one
about me so quickly.

(Beat)

WISE

You right you right. I think I'm nervous.

(Beat)

ERNIE

I think I'm nervous too.

WISE

I'll tell you one thing though, you do know how to
speak your mind.

ERNIE

Takes one to know one.

WISE

With regards to my education, I got a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology, and I'm proud of that.

ERNIE

That's great, you should be. And with regards to mine, I don't have a Masters or a PHD. In fact, I never studied writing.

WISE

What!?! But you're good at it though.

ERNIE

I have a BA in acting.

WISE

Acting!

ERNIE

You don't have to rub it in.

WISE

So what did you act in?

ERNIE

You mean what did I *try* to act in? The fact that I wrote a book that was published and that you were quoting from it... is not something I would have thought possible.

(ERNIE has a beat of reflection.)

WISE

You alright?

ERNIE

I think I would like that cup of coffee?

(WISE gets up, gets the hot pot (one of those plug in dorm style kettles, and another brown plastic cup. He sets about making her coffee.)

WISE

It's still hot. They don't let us use regular sugar no more on account of people making wine, or pruno or whatever, in they cells, but I got sweetner and powdered milk if you want.

ERNIE

Black with 1 sweetner please. I don't like powdered milk.

WISE

You wouldn't do too good in here then. Just about everything you can think of comes in a powdered form.

(HE hands the coffee to her. SHE takes a sip.)

ERNIE

Thank you.

WISE

You're welcome Miss, or I should say Mrs. Morris. I see you wearing what looks like two wedding rings on your finger. Or are you married to two men at once?

ERNIE

Why don't you just call me Ernie.

WISE

Okay, Ernie.

ERNIE

So, what's the program you were mentioning?

WISE

I started a program in here to help the men understand that they don't need to keep coming in and out and in and out of here. I'm trying to prevent as many as possible from becoming one more black man living they entire life in prison.

ERNIE

What's your success rate?

WISE

Over 5000 men have taken it. 300 have been released. NO re-arrests.

ERNIE

That's great! When I was walking through the yard, I saw so so so many men, who look like they could be my father, my brother, my cousins/

WISE

They doing time?

ERNIE
No.

WISE
How about your husband?

ERNIE
No.

WISE
He white.

ERNIE
No.

WISE
Are you telling me you ain't got no incarcerated family members?

ERNIE
Yes. This is my first time ever being in a prison. I was struck by the number of black and brown men. I knew, but when I saw...I did see a few white women/ who are they?

WISE
Volunteers. Most of them are white. Truth be told, I thought you was a white man. Most black people, except for *your* family, already got somebody or more than one person in here. Why would anyone want to volunteer at a place got all they relatives, neighbors, friends, enemies, and acquaintances locked up? Where you from anyway?

ERNIE
They told me not to give out any personal information. So, what would you like my help with?

WISE
Okay, so this is where I am, okay? More than anything, I want to be free of these walls. They say that if you die in prison, your soul is trapped inside forever. If I walk outside and somebody pulls out their pistol and shoots me dead. At least I'll die free. I'm 62 years old and I'm closer to death than life by now... and Ernie, I want to prove...that I've changed.

ERNIE
How long have you been here?

WISE

I just made 46 years.

ERNIE

Wow! That's a long time.

WISE

Tell me about it. Anyhow, I got a parole hearing in 6 months. It'll be my fourteenth time going in front of the Parole Board. They don't find you suitable they say come back in 1,3, 5 years, whatever. Last time they give me 5 years.

ERNIE

Suitable?

WISE

Suitable for parole. Suitable to be allowed to rejoin society.

ERNIE

Oh.

WISE

They said I didn't understand my causative factors. Which is bullshit! Sorry.

ERNIE

Why is it bullshit?

WISE

You ask anybody from this prison not found suitable what reason the board gave, every one of them's going to say causative factors. It's the reason they like to give because there's no right answer. It's not something you can prove, so if they don't want you to go home, it's what they gon' say. Somebody should expose how unfair the process is. Writers always coming in here wanting to write about Death Row. How come nobody never want to write about somebody like me? I wish people on the outside could see us as individuals, 'cause then they might want write about us.

ERNIE

That's because Death Row's dramatic.

WISE

I'm dramatic.

ERNIE

I'm sure you are.

WISE

I've helped a lot of people with writing their impact statements for the parole board, and some of them have been found suitable and are out there living free now. I've been here a long time, Ernie. I was 16 when I got off the gray goose and they give me my fish kit. I ain't even started shaving yet/ First time, my Cellie keep saying, "you going against the grain!" I didn't know what he was talking about. He had to show me how to hold the razor. And now here I am, 62 years old and they think I'm still that same person don't know how to hold a razor. So I think, you know, of all people, I should be able to do it for myself... by now. It's a short speech explaining that I've done everything in my power to make ammends for the crime I committed. I ain't never asked nobody for no help with mine before, but if you could write *that* statement for me, I think it would make a difference.

ERNIE

I'm not understanding why you can't write this yourself?

WISE

Yes, you're right, I should be able to. For instance, I know more about causative factors than most people. I know more about all of it than most people. But I just can't never seem to get it right when I'm doing it for myself... I committed a crime. Judge send me to the Pen to do time. Fine. Okay, I done it. But you find yourself in here, they don't never want to give you a real chance to leave. And I deserve a chance. I deserve the chance to have a chance. We all do. I ain't never claimed that I didn't do what I've done. But I want for them to see that there's more to me than just that one cold act and I can't never seem to find the words...Can you help me find the words to show those people the inside of myself so that they can understand and respect me, like what you did for the refrigerator man. Because, truth be told, he sounded like a joker when I first started reading and you changed my mind. I need to...change their minds.

?

(beat)
So, you gon' help a brother out?...Please. I need
your help.

(Lights cross fade to)

SCENE 3

(ERNIE walks into her apartment, eating out of a takeout container. SHE finishes it and throws the container out. SHE moves into the living room area. Sits on the couch. Turns the TV on. Turns it off. She sits at her desk and stares at her laptop. SHE turns it on.)

ERNIE

I am sitting here looking at these keys. I see my fingers on the keys and...I have nothing to write.

(SHE turns the laptop off.)

Shit!

(There's a box shaped urn made out of nice wood. She pushes the laptop away and pulls the box towards her. She may rest her head on the box.)

I wish you were here.

(The phone rings.)

Go away.

(It rings again. SHE answers.)

Hello. Who? Oh, Pat's friend. Yes, I remember. I said, I remember...Okay, hello hello, sorry to interrupt but I don't want to go out for a drink with you I have no romantic interest in you and I never will so please do not call me again or I will change my phone number Thank you Good-bye.

(SHE hangs up. SHE stands up. Sits back down. Hesitates, then picks the phone up again and scrolls through her voicemails and pushes play/speakerphone. SHE sets the volume as high as it will go and sets the phone on the table. SHE leans forward and simply listens.)

CHARLIE'S VOICE

(he sings the first stanza of the Stevie Wonder
Song "*If It's Magic*")
*"If it's magic, then why can't it be everlasting,
like the sun that always shines. Like the poet in
this rhyme. Like the galaxies of time."*
(he chuckles, then speaks)
Call me back. I can't wait till you get home.

ERNIE

I wish I could call you back now.

(She presses play again.)

CHARLIE'S VOICE

*"If it's magic, then why can't it be everlasting,
like the sun that always shines..."/*

(Lights crossfade,)

SCENE 4

(WISE addresses his YOP Class)

WISE

Okay Class, how many of y'all want to be a millionaire? How about a billionaire? Name me 5 billionaires. Y'all always talking about getting money, "I need money, got to have my money" but you can't even name me 5 billionaires. Now, if I ask you to name me 15 hip hop artists, I won't be able to write the names down fast enough. You know the songs, you can quote all the lyrics, but them music videos, did you know that everything you see, the mansion, the girls, the whole nine is rented. Them cats don't own none of it. Soon as the video is over, they got to vacate the premises. It's an illusion. And most of them ain't got nothing much to say. They talkin' about getting locked up like it's a vacation. Do any of y'all consider this a vacation? Pac and Biggie, now them cats was artists. And I ain't sayin' there's anything wrong with these cats you listening to, I'm just sayin' a rapper is not the only and most important thing a person can be. And you got to be good at it to succeed. Because catch this, each and every one of us in here has a talent and a greatness that if we can find out what it is and how to excell at it, we will be as successful as anyone. I see some of y'all shaking your heads.

(beat)

Most of us in here because we was chasin' money, right? Okay. Suppose I tell you there's a way you can make money without doing something can send you to prison but you got to be strong enough to resist temptation. 'Cause when you get out, homeboys'll be waiting for you. Say, "take this package over there for me. Make you some change" and that's how in 5 minutes, you right back in the game without even blinking.

(beat)

I know what people didn't tell y'all coming up because they didn't tell me the same thing. Didn't nobody say you can be a lawyer, or a doctor, hell, you could even be a C.O. Look at all the money these people making off of us. Those guards that you see, they get good pay, good pensions, they own houses, have families.

(more)

WISE (cont'd)

And the brothers that you see in here doing it, them brothers is all earning more than you will ever make hustling in the streets. Them brothers is looking out for themselves and for they families.

(beat)

When I caught the case that put me in here, I had the same mindset as y'all. Whatever y'all did. I've done it too. Our world view, is based on what we've been exposed to. That's why you can't name me five billionaires, and that's why you don't know the people who are actually running the world that you live in. You've got to change your mindset to change your life!

(Lights crossfade to,)

SCENE 5

(WISE goes to the yard. The sun is setting, the moon is rising. The big curls of barbed wire atop the tall walls throw a shadow onto the dirt ground. HE stands throwing little pieces of bread to the geese. MCHENRY comes up behind him. WISE doesn't turn around but he feels the C.O.'s presence.)

WISE

I been out here twenty minutes. Usually, geese be congregating by this time waiting for me to feed them. Where they at?

MC HENRY

I don't know.

WISE

It's weird.

MC HENRY

Who knows. Almost count time. You should start heading back to your cell block.

WISE

Beautiful sunset tonight though wasn't it? That's the harvest moon. See how big it is? Did you ever notice there are usually more geese in this yard around full moon time, but not tonight. That's what I'm trying to figure out. It don't feel like the weather be trippin or nothing. They not coming around for me to feed like usual.

MC HENRY

Do you think geese are that deliberate?

WISE

It ain't random that's for sure.

MC HENRY

I've never noticed anything about more or less geese in here around the stages of the moon. How can you track something like that?

WISE

You ain't been out of training a full year yet have you?

8 months.

MC HENRY

I thought so.
(beat)
I knew your Pops.

MC HENRY

Yeah?

WISE

Yeah.
(beat)
I been clocking these geese for a long time now. It started because I wondered why they like being in here so much. I know we're right by the water...but still, this is just a dirt yard, nothing in here to keep them coming back... You see this chart?
(He shows the MCHENRY his notebook)
That's 30 years of goose tracking. And I've caught every single full moon since,
(he flips back pages to the beginning)
1987. Okay, you see here where it says full moon, January 15, 1987? Then here it says 22 geese? Now, look at this line, January 26, 1987, not the full moon, 10 geese. March 28, 2003, full moon 44 geese.
(turns a big chunk of pages)
Alright, now look at this, September 6, 2016 Harvest moon, 72 geese! That was the most I ever seen.

MC HENRY

So, what happened the day after the 6th?

WISE

September 7, 30 geese.

MC HENRY

Huh.

WISE

I was hoping today...but ain't even one..

(The C.O.'s walkie talkie crackles and mumbles something incoherent WISE sits onto the ground.)

WISE

(continuing)
Alarm.

What? MC HENRY

Alarm. WISE

(MCHENRY scans the premises. HE is on alert.)

How'd you hear that? MC HENRY

Clear. WALKIE TALKIE

You can get up. MC HENRY

(WISE gets up, maybe MCHENRY has to help.)

WISE

That's the 2nd or 3rd false alarm today.

MC HENRY

What were you saying about/ my father?

LOUDSPEAKER

/Yard Recall. Yard Recall.

WISE

Gotta go. Close B Count.

(WISE throws the last bit of bread out for the birds. He walks towards his cellblock without a backward glance at the C.O..)

(Lights crossfade,)

SCENE 6

(ERNIE and WISE sit at the table in the work room. He is making coffee. ERNIE looks around then takes a sugar packet out of her pocket.)

ERNIE

Want to share? That sweetner's a little rough on my taste buds.

WISE

(looking around)

We're not supposed to...give it here quick.

(HE quickly tears the packet, sprinkles some of the sugar in his cup and hands her the packet. She puts the rest in her cup and stirs. He drinks.)

(sighing)

Now that is what a cup of coffee is supposed to taste like! Thank you.

ERNIE

Truth is, I did it for myself, I hate that sweetner.

WISE

We lost our sugar and honey 7 years ago. Man, I miss honey so much.

ERNIE

Want me to bring you some? They have these little squeeze packets?

WISE

Nah, that's not a good idea. I see that you don't care about the rules in here?

ERNIE

I do. I just don't think a pack of sugar is that serious, is it?

WISE

They catch me with that sugar, that's a write up. It could cost me my parole, it could send me to the hole. It could get me transferred to a level 4, maximum security prisom.

ERNIE

I didn't know.

WISE

You break a rule and you with me, I'm the one gets a one fifteen. And they won't let you come in here no more.

ERNIE

I'm sorry.

WISE

In here not the same as out there. But thank you for this, it tastes right.

ERNIE

So I was thinking, we should sure you mention your causative factors.

(She hands him a notebook and pen, he may or may not actually write anything. SHE may gesture he should write from time to time.)

WISE

There are psych evals in my file. They tell my entire life story.

ERNIE

But maybe we should list the highlights.

WISE

The highlights. You make it sound like a movie or something.

ERNIE

I think we should think of it like that. We pick the most interesting and best examples of what made you do what you did. Who you were when you got here.

WISE

When I got here 46 years ago, I was on my way to getting merked.

ERNIE

What?

WISE

Getting bodied. Getting killed. Even after I got in here, it took me years to transform. Coming up, I was thugged out, drugging, drinking, fighting, conning, hustling, running the streets with my homeboys. Our mission was to let everybody know they could get hurt or die messing with us.

(more)

WISE (cont'd)

We didn't care about no one and we were not supposed to have feelings about nothing. Homeboy kill Bobo in front of you, "Keep steppin' and don't say nothin' to nobody." I think I was 8... I was coming home from the store with an ice cream. Somebody shot a dude, he fell dead in front of me. I kept licking my icecream, stepped over him and went home. Hood rules say boys ain't supposed to cry. Somebody shoot your cousin, "Get over it." Your Mama dead, "Get over it." My mother died when I was 13. I didn't even know she was sick. I had to go hide under the house to cry so nobody could see me. This one time, I get there and my brother's already down there crying himself. I busted him. Well, we kind of busted each other. Both of us hiding so nobody can catch us crying, "You crying. No, I'm not. You crying. No, I'm not! Don't tell nobody. I ain't saying nuttin to nobody." Both of us sniffing and wiping our nose and eyes with our t-shirts.

ERNIE

So you went down the wrong track because your mom died?

WISE

No. When I was 5,6 I was already getting sent to the principal's office. Sent home, detention, expelled. Matter of fact, the first time they send me to the juvenile hall, I was 9 and I had stabbed somebody.

ERNIE

Why?

WISE

I was protecting my homie, and I knew how to use a knife.

ERNIE

At age nine!?

WISE

Yeah.

ERNIE

Did he die?

WISE

No, and it was self defense...

ERNIE
It's alot.

WISE
Yes it is.

(Beat. ERNIE politely takes the notebook and pen from him. SHE goes into acting mode. Stands.)

ERNIE
So, okay, let's pretend you're introducing yourself to the parole board. Go!

WISE
My name is James Hakeem/

ERNIE
You sound stiff.

WISE
I just started.

ERNIE
Start again. How many people are there?

WISE
Last time there were 4 people.

ERNIE
Mr.Jamerson, would you please tell us about yourself?

WISE
"Um...my name is James Hakeem Jamerson I am 62 years old I was born on February 11, 1957. Should I say here that I was convicted and came to prison when I was 16?

ERNIE
You could say, when I was 16 I was convicted da da da...

WISE
When I was 16, I was sentenced, no sorry, I was convicted, no, that's wrong... Aargh!

ERNIE
Okay. Stop. Stop. You're nervous and there's no reason to be.

WISE
I'm not nervous.

ERNIE
You are.

WISE
I'm not.

ERNIE
You are! Now, take a deep breath.
(he doesn't)
Do it! Breathe!
(she shows him, dramatically lifting arms. He quickly breathes out.)
Thank you. One more.
(SHE again demonstrates a dramatic lifting of her arm to breathe in and out. HE pitifully lifts one arm.)
Okay. Now, et's start over. What happened the last time? Start at the beginning. Blow by blow.

(WISE stands and totally loses himself in his recounting.)

WISE
Okay. I walk in and I face,
(pointing)
The Commissioner, the Deputy DA, the rest of the panel they're all sitting in front of me, on the other side of this long table. Joan, my lawyer, Joan Hornig is sitting to my right. Victim's family is further to the right. Their eyes be shooting bullets at me and I can feel every one of them. I'm not supposed to look at them. In fact I try not to look at nobody directly because I know I'm at their mercy and it makes me feel even more nervous. I know that in their eyes I'm nothing. So, I'm standing there, I say, "Good morning, thank you for this opportunity. My name is James Hakeem Jamerson and I am speaking to you today to say I am not the same boy of 16 that I was when I got here and I wish I didn't have to speak to you today. I know the difference between right and wrong after all these years that I've been incarcerated. Thank you for this opportunity." and I went to sit, and then I realized, Damn I forgot to say the most important thing!

(HE turns as if to go sit down, changes mind, turns back.)

So, I say, "I'm sorry but I forgot something that I wanted to say to the family," and I look at them I know I'm not supposed to. I know that they hate me but they been quiet this time compared to the other times. I look and they looking at me with hatred. And I forget what I want to say I forget how to talk. Finally, I just say, "I'm sorry." Chairperson say, "Mr. Jamerson, don't look over there, look here." That's when the family start, "You a monster! We not safe with somebody like you free in the streets!" Chairperson call *them* to order. She say to me, "You got anything further to say?" And I say, "No M'am." She suddenly say, "Mr. Jamerson, why did you do it?"

(Long long beat)

"I don't know." And the minute I say it, my heart sink, and I know I blew it again. They dismiss us so that they can deliberate. We go outside. Sit. Joan say, "There's still a chance, your file is great, not everybody has a letter of support from the Warden." But I know. And she know. They call us back in about an hour later and give me their denial of parole.

ERNIE

That fast?

WISE

That's the one positive thing about a parole hearing, your suspense don't last too long. "Mr. Jamerson, we find you unsuitable. You haven't convinced us that you feel remorse for your crime nor do we believe you understand your causative factors." I have heard them say that shit thirteen times now. Before I know it...it's like I'm watching myself, and I'm trying to stop myself but it's too late. I say, "I am not a child! I know that what I did was wrong! And if you read my file you would realize that!" Chairperson say, "Do not raise your voice in here, Mr. Jamerson." "I'm sorry." "The period of denial is five years."

(WISE bows his head for a moment, overwhelmed by his memory, and sits quietly.)

And that was it.

ERNIE

Your statement lacked details. There's no indication that you think or care about anything. For one thing, you should probably start with what you did.

WISE

Why? They know what I did.

ERNIE

Well, I think if you say it like you are taking responsibility and start like that, it will have an impact. We're here to figure out an interesting way to get to the meat of this.

WISE

The meat of it? What do you mean by the meat? What meat?

ERNIE

I mean the point of your statement. The thing that will prove to them that you're different in some way.

WISE

Wouldn't you expect someone who's 62 to be different from a 16 year old.

ERNIE

It's not about what I expect, yes, I would expect it. It's what they want.

WISE

What they want, what they want. It's political. They don't want anything, but the enjoyment of telling someone no.

ERNIE

Still, humor me. Tell me how you're different?

(HE doesn't answer.)

How is it political?

(HE doesn't answer.)

You don't seem to be in a statement writing mood today.

WISE

I ain't never in that kind of mood.

(Long uncomfortable Beat)

ERNIE

I know you've gone through this 13 times. But you're also still here, so clearly something's wrong. I can tell you that based on what I just heard, I wouldn't let you out myself, because you didn't say anything.

WISE

I shouldn't even have to say anything. I shouldn't even have to be there. Everything they need is in my records. All they want to talk about is what happened 46 years ago. Over and over and over. The amount of time they spend going over what happened. They spend almost no time on who I am now. What I've done. What I want to do. I just want to...

ERNIE

To what?
(no answer)
What?

WISE

To leave.

ERNIE

I want you to leave too. And I'm trying to help you. You asked me for my help, and I'm trying to do that, and you're not cooperating. I know you don't like it. Tough. It has to be done, so let's do it. Do it my way this time, you fail, we go back to the old way, the 15th time.

WISE

You're bossy as hell you know that?

ERNIE

I do know it. But if you want my help, you have to deal with it.

WISE

I just want to go home and prove I changed.

(CLUE walks in.)

Hold up. Clue, where you been at? You said you was coming to the class last night. JB say you told him you was coming too. That's the second time now. The Kronos will reflect it and you won't get your credit.

CLUE

(sullenly)
I been busy.

WISE

Busy doing what, we in a prison. Hey, this is Ernie, she the lady wrote that story about the refrigerator man.

Oh yeh, hey. CLUE

Hi. ERNIE

(CLUE barely registers her)

(to Clue) WISE
I need to talk to you.

What? CLUE

(WISE takes him to the side in an attempt to speak privately. Ernie can hear but is pretending she can't.)

What's going on? WISE

Nothing. CLUE

WISE
It's not no nothing. Last week you stop coming to class. And look at you. I could smell the weed on you before you walked in the door. You been listening to anything I been saying in the class?

What? CLUE

WISE
If you don't watch out... you want to end up like me? What's going on?

Nothing. CLUE

WISE
You got a lot of talent in you, youngster. I like to listen to you spit. You good. You trying to say something. Put me in mind of Pac.

(CLUE brightens for a moment. Then he gets sullen again.)

Yeh? CLUE

WISE
Why you tripping?

CLUE
Man, I ain't tripping. You don't know me.

WISE
I know you like I know myself.

(CLUE sucks his teeth and walks away.)
Where you going? At least give me the respect to let
me say what I gotta say.

(Clue stops)
I know that something's going on.

CLUE
(muttering under his breath)
You don't know shit.

WISE
What? Man, at least be a man and talk to me.

(Beat)

CLUE
My little brother in jail right now for murder. He
12.

WISE
Damn! Come here lil bro.

(CLUE tentatively takes a few steps
towards WISE who grabs and hugs
him. CLUE is not familiar with being
hugged. HE falls apart. ERNIE watches
worriedly.)
I got you. You hear me? I got you. I got you. I got
you.

ERNIE
(when they move apart)
Does he have a lawyer? Because I have a friend who's
a lawyer, maybe she could help him.

WISE
You see? Thank you, Ernie.

ERNIE
Who's responsible for him?

CLUE

Me. If I was there, I would not have let him do what he done. That's why he end up where he at now. Ain't nobody else he ever listen to but me.

ERNIE

What's his name?

CLUE

Trayshawn Burke.

ERNIE

(writing it down)

How can I find out information so I can help him?

CLUE

I can give your number to my Uncle. When he call you, he'll tell you where they got Tray.

ERNIE

(tearing a sheet out of her notebook and offering it to Clue.)

Here. I'm going to help Tray. Okay?

(CLUE takes the paper from her, nods, puts it in his pocket, and leaves.)

WISE

(calling after him)

Come to class, 5:30!

(to Ernie)

You know you're not supposed to give out your number like that, right?

ERNIE

How can I help him if I don't? I have to help him.

WISE

Okay. Okay.

ERNIE

Is there any hope?

(Beat)

WISE

There is so much hope you wouldn't believe it.

(Lights cross to,)

SCENE 7

(ERNIE stands facing the audience.
Listening as Charlie's voicemail plays.)

CHARLIE'S VOICE

(he sings)
"If it's magic, then why can't it be everlasting,
like the sun that always shines, like the poet in
this rhyme. Like the galaxies of time, "
(he chuckles, then speaks)
Call me back. I can't wait till you get home."

ERNIE

The day Charlie died, I was out doing errands. He called and left a message on my voicemail, singing his favorite Stevie Wonder song, and told me to call him back because it couldn't wait till I got home. And when I called him back, he said "I just wanted to tell you a few things: You have the biggest heart. Don't be afraid to let people see it." Then he said, "Listen to your voice above everyone else's. Even mine." Then he asked me if I knew why that song was his favorite... You've got to understand, it was cold. And I had to take my gloves off to call him, and stand there while he was saying all of this crazy stuff, and I was on my way home. And I told him that too. "Can't this wait? I'll be home in a half hour. It's cold!"

(beat)

He said, "I just realized I've never told you this." I could just see him sitting there laughing at me, on the verge of exploding, at him. He loved to tease me. I said, "You have five fast seconds, Go!" He said, "One second is not faster or slower than another second..." I was about to hang up. I really was.

(beat)

The call dropped. And I didn't call back because I was on my way home.... And I didn't understand...why he would leave me with a song that never mentions the word love?

(Lights cross fade.)

SCENE 8

(The yard. CLUE trying a beat.)

CLUE

LIL MAN BE WALKING
LIKE TALKING LIKE SAGGING
LIKE BRAGGING LIKE ME.
SAY HE WANT TO BE.
SAY HE JUST LIKE ME.
SAY HE CAN DEAL LIKE ME.
SAY HE CAN FEEL LIKE ME.
HE SAY HE DOPING, HE SMOKING
NOT COPING, PROVOKING, CHOKING,
FUSSIN AND CUSSIN, CORRUPTION, PERCUSSION, AND
REPURCUSSION
BOY, YOU THINK YOU CAN DEAL LIKE ME? THINK YOU CAN
STEAL LIKE ME, THINK YOU CAN SAG LIKE SWAG LIKE/
FUCK LIKE ME.

LOUDSPEAKER

Yard recall. Yard recall

CLUE

38 AINT NO GAME LIL BRO, 38 AINT THE SAME THING
THOUGH, POINTING YA 38 BE INSANE YO/

LOUDSPEAKER

Yard Recall. Yard Recall/

(CLUE looks around as if to find
someone to hit or something to throw.
McHENRY Enters and watches. CLUE leaves
the yard and bump into him.)

MC HENRY

Hey! Watch where you're going!

(CLUE gives him silent attitude but
continues off. McHENRY look after him.)

(Lights crossfade,)

SCENE 9

(ERNIE enters, WISE is waiting. THEY shake hands. ERNIE is not in the friendliest of moods. Something's off.)

WISE

Ernie!

ERNIE

Hey.

WISE

I pretty much can't wait till the days you come.

ERNIE

That's nice to hear. Thank you.

(she hands WISE some pages.)

If I don't see Jerome later, would you please give him his story and tell him I made some edits.

WISE

I'll give it to him. But I'm sure your husband or whoever...

(is he digging? Yes he is.)

is happy to see you when you get home.

(Beat)

ERNIE

I don't have anyone.

WISE

Whaaat!? The gorgeous brilliant Ernie Morris don't got nobody, we all doomed then.

(Beat. She makes the decision to tell him.)

ERNIE

My husband died three years ago.

WISE

I didn't know that. I'm sorry.

(ERNIE is trying to stay calm and unemotional. She doesn't want to discuss this.)

ERNIE

Thanks.

WISE

How long were you married?

ERNIE

19...almost twenty years.

WISE

Damn. That's a long time. I guess you were broken hearted?

ERNIE

Yes.

WISE

So, y'all had any kids?

ERNIE

No.

WISE

You didn't want none?

ERNIE

We did, but we didn't have any. Okay? So, now, why don't we pick up where we/

WISE

I ain't never had my heart broken before. I have felt brokenness in different areas of my life though.

(Long beat)

ERNIE

An update erased my husband's message on my phone last night, so I'm a little bummed today but nothing can be done about it so let's just pick up where we were/

WISE

Wait a minute, what are you saying?

ERNIE

About what? Wise, I really don't want to talk about this.

WISE

You're not making sense. How could he leave you a message if he dead?

ERNIE

What?! Oh... It was an message from before he died. Apple updates it's software so you're always getting messages to download the update...and last night I got one, downloaded it, and it erased his voicemail.

WISE

You didn't know that was going to happen?

ERNIE

No, I wouldn't have done it if I did. I called Apple, they say it was a glitch. My brother's a tech genius and he said there's nothing that can be done. It's lost. He left the message the day he died.

WISE

(totally oblivious)

But if it's been three years, you're over it by now right? And a pretty woman like you shouldn't have no trouble finding a new man. You must not be looking hard enough/'cause I know you could find someone easy.

ERNIE

You do not know...Anything about this! I don't want to talk about it.

WISE

Okay.

(beat)

The problem is you got yourself on some kind of self imposed Maximum Lockdown.

ERNIE

What!?

WISE

A lockdown don't always mean you being punished. But because you can't do nothing during it, it's more of a punishment than your regular incarceration.

ERNIE

So what is it for then?

WISE

It depends. You got your controlled, modified, or maximum lockdowns. Maximum is the most serious level. Sometimes it's to protect you. Something happened, or something about to pop, it could be anything...

(more)

WISE (cont'd)

The good thing is, it always comes to an end. They unlock the rack, All the doors on the tier open. You step out of your cell onto the tier. you walk outside. The sun shines down on your face, and you stand there just feeling that heat. So what I'm trying to say is it's time to forget about it, there is no reason for you to keep punishing yourself forever.

(HE points to ERNIE's book on the table.)

Hey, I finally remembered to bring your book down from the cell, and I want you to sign it for me.

(HE picks the book up and tentatively hands it to ERNIE. SHE grabs it from him.)

ERNIE

Give me the fucking book! I'll sign it and then I'm going home to... my self imposed cell. I can't do this. It was a message to me, okay? It was a very special message. TO ME! And now it's gone and I'm never going to hear his voice again.

(SHE sobs.)

(WISE stares helplessly from across the table, he gets up and stares at her at a loss. HE leaves and returns with a few single paper towels he got out of a dispenser by the toilets in the yard. HE awkwardly tries to stuff them in ERNIE's hand. HE stands worriedly for a moment then leaves again and comes back with a granola bar and a starlight peppermint.)

(ERNIE wipes her eyes and blows her nose.)

WISE

(offering)
Here's a snack.

(SHE shakes her head.)

ERNIE

I don't want to forget what he sounds like.

WISE
Somebody murder him?

ERNIE
No.

WISE
What happened?

ERNIE
It was a heart attack, I think.

WISE
You think? They ain't never told you?

ERNIE
I have the autopsy report.

WISE
But you ain't never looked at it?

ERNIE
I couldn't.

WISE
I'm sorry that you went through something like that.
I wish I could take all of this hurt inside of you
and make it disappear.

(She hears him. They connect.)

ERNIE
His name was Charlie. He was a photo journalist. A
really good one. I told him about the refrigerator
man, and he said, "You've got to write this". And I
said "but I'm not a writer" and he said "you don't
know what you are or aren't until you try." The only
way I could write it was to pretend I was telling it
to him.

WISE
He sounds cool. I wish I could have met him.

ERNIE
I haven't been able to write since he died.

WISE
But you're a real good writer.

ERNIE

I can't get... any words to come out.

(beat)

Let's work on your statement.

WISE

I appreciate you telling me about your husband. All I got left is my sister. She the only one of us stay straight. Go to church, work, got kids and grandkids now. I sometimes wonder who I could have turned out to be if I had the same opportunities you had. School. Parents working jobs, pushing us to try to succeed.

(beat)

I killed a man.

(Beat)

ERNIE

Okay.

WISE

I'll tell you about it some other time.

ERNIE

You can tell me now if you want.

WISE

I don't want to upset you no more today.

ERNIE

I'm okay. I googled your name and I couldn't find anything. Probably because you were a minor.

WISE

They got me for first degree murder, armed robbery. I hit this pawn shop.

(As WISE recounts what happened that day, he should lose himself in the story.)

With a dude I barely knew, I say "Bro, let's go hit this lick." Funny thing is, just before we walk in, he say to me, "Man you sure you want to do this?" And you know how you get that funny feeling? That was my intuition trying to save me, but I ignore it.

(more)

WISE (cont'd)

We walk in, there ain't no customers, I tie up the owner and say to the dude, "watch him." I go behind the counter, open a drawer, I'm putting jewelry, cash, guns, everything in my bag, and while I'm doing that, I trip a silent alarm. The door suddenly bust open and a police is standing there and he got his hand reaching down like this,

(shows her)

reaching for his pistol, so, without even thinking,

(shows her how he pointed his gun,)

I point my 32 and shoot, BAM, and that one bullet goes into the heart of a 40 year old white policeman, name of Anthony Riley. It ricochets off his aorta, and does a lot of damage, and by the time he hit the ground he's dead.

(beat)

We don't check nor nothing. We run out of there. Homie go one way at the corner, I go the other way. I run. When I stop to catch my breath. I'm on a street. Cars are parked down the block. I look around, nobody. I try the doors. 2nd car, boom, unlocked. I look around. Nobody. I get in, crouch down on the floor in the back. I hear police approaching. Dogs. Closer and closer. I make myself small as I can. I say, "Keep going. Keep going. Keep going." I try to stop my heart from beating so loud. When I look up. The car is surrounded. Guns are pointing at me through the window. They say, "Come out with your hands up!" I say to myself, "Don't move." I'm thinking if I don't move, something will change. But the door opens. They snatch me. Throw me onto the pavement. Cuff me. Put me in their car. Drive to the station. Book me. I pose. Turn left right and center, then, boom, that's it. Land in here.

ERNIE

And it's his family that comes to the hearings.

WISE

His wife and daughter come every time. Girl was 7 when it happened, she's a grown woman now. Wife's about 80. Both still mad as hell at me.

ERNIE

Do you understand why?

WISE

Yes. But it's been over 40 years. They still acting like it just happened.

ERNIE

For the rest of their lives it's going to feel like it just happened. Losing someone is terrible/

WISE

I know/

ERNIE

No, you don't! Losing someone suddenly is like...it's like he's talking and he gets to the middle of the sentence and you wait for him to say the next word but he doesn't, and you want more than anything to know what he was going to say next. And all the things that were going to happen next. So you go back to the beginning of the sentence and you get to the place where he stopped. And you keep doing that. Over and over and over. From the beginning to where he stopped. From the beginning to where he stopped. From the beginning, to where he stopped.

(SHE gets up and gathers her notebook, her pen, her water. SHE starts to walk away, but comes back.)

You better make it very clear that you realize you are the kind of person who would fuck someone up...

(pointing to herself)
like... this.

WISE

I wouldn't/

ERNIE

Do not interrupt me! Take responsibility for your actions. For what you did to them! And tell them so that they know. This is who I am. This is what I did. This is what I did to YOU. You say, "Mrs.Riley, your husband is dead because of ME. I killed him!" Then you tell her that you realize the consequences of what you did to him, and to his daughter, and to her.

WISE

I remember leaving that/ man laying there.

ERNIE

WHAT YOU DID TO HER! SHE doesn't know that you even think about it because you haven't told her, or she doesn't believe you, and why should she? Why should she care what the fuck you think!

(more)

ERNIE (cont'd)

Let HER know that you wish you could take the hurt out of HER and make it disappear. Pretend she's me.

WISE

(starting to break)

I would never hurt you/

ERNIE

I feel what she feels, so you did. There isn't one single excuse you could ever come up with for doing what you did that would be acceptable!

(SHE leaves WISE sitting there, devastated.)

SCENE 10

CLUE

SITTIN HERE WISHIN I COULD CLIMB THIS BARB WIRE
SIPPIN ON PRUNO, YEAH, THAT SHIT IS FIRE!
SCAPIN' FROM LIVING A LIFE OF NON-SENSE
LIFE DOING TIME ADD UP TO NO-SENSE
DOING TIME HAS GOT ME FEELING AGE-LESS
'CAUSE IN MY DREAMS I'M LIVING CAGE-LESS
WHILE I BE BLEEDING WEAVING AND DODGING FROM THE
RAMPAGE
A BUNCH OF GOONS AND OG'S IN THEY MIDDLE AGE
THEY WHO I DOGGING AND PLOTTING HOW TO UPSTAGE
IT ONE CLEAR DIRECTION I CAN AIM MY RAGE
LIL BRO BE SITTING IN HIS OWN CAGE
SAY HE OUTSIDE THINKING HE CAN BE ME
SAY HE BE OUTSIDE DOING HOW HE SEE ME
SHOULDA' NOT BEEN WORRYIN' HOW TO BE ME
NOW HE THE ONE CRYING SALTY TEARS,
HE THE ONE LOOKING AT LOST YEARS,
HE THE ONE GOT MURDER ON HIS RAP SHEET IN THE
DIRTYARD TRYING TO FIND HIS OWN BEAT, BUT
HE ESCAPE THE HELL OF MINIMUM WAGE YO,
CAUSE HE BE THERE AND I BE HERE AND I CAN'T RETRO,
I CAN'T DO NOTHING FROM IN HERE I AIN'T NO ARROW
THIS SHIT BE REAL, THIS SHIT AIN'T NOTHING TO BE
LAUGHING BOUT.

(beat)

SITTING HERE WISHIN I COULD CLIMB THIS BARB WIRE
SIPPIN ON SOME PRUNO, MAA-AN, THAT SHIT IS FIRE!
SCAPIN' FROM LIVING A LIFE OF NON-SENSE
LIFE DOING TIME NOW ADD UP TO NO-SENSE
DOING TIME HAS GOT ME FEELING AGE-LESS/

(MCHENRY walks up to him and starts
clapping rudely in his face. CLUE stops
rapping abruptly.)

MC HENRY

Why're you out here? Aren't you supposed to be in
that class?

CLUE

(mumbling)

I'm going.

MC HENRY

What?

CLUE
I didn't say nuttin, man.

MC HENRY
What?

CLUE
I said, I'm going.

MC HENRY
Because if you're taking a class, that's where
you're supposed to be, not out in the yard. Do you
understand.

(CLUE doesn't answer.)
Go to your class!

CLUE
(fuming)
I said, I'm going.

(HE leaves. MCHENRY watches as he
leaves.)

(Lights crossfade)

SCENE 11

(WISE carrying his shock and sorrow from his previous scene addresses the class. CLUE sits watching. WISE notices CLUE and may address some of the scene to him.)

WISE

I don't know if any of y'all ever had somebody tell you that they love you. My mother died when I was 13. She the only one ever said it to me. But I remember what it feel like to hear. So, I want to tell you that I love you. You can walk through your life after today, knowing that a man named Wise loves you. You hear me? I love each one of you. A lot of us ain't got no understanding what it is to be loved, what it is to be respected and cared about. We had to go find our love out in the streets. The mindset we found there is, "Whoever I hurt, whoever I do damage to, it don't matter." That's because we don't see our victims as people, let's keep it real, let's keep it 100, we don't even see ourselves as people. In the hood, ain't nobody talking about no "Who know a good psychiatrist I can go to? Because, man, I think I been traumatized. I seen my Daddy hit by the police in front of my house for doing nothing. And Homie got hit on my watch, his blood and brains splattered all over my shoes." We pretend those things are normal. It's what led us to prison and what's got us sitting in this classroom today. And none of it is normal and none of it is okay. If the reason you in here, is because you hurt somebody, it means you ain't the shit you thought you was.

(CLUE leaves.)

Wait a minute. Clue, where you going? I ain't finished/

(Calling after CLUE)

I want to help you, Son! I love you! I love you!

(resuming to class)

Some of us did some bad things that hurt someone and we need to realize that. Something else we need to realize is that every one of us has something we're good at. When you figure out what that is you'll discover the world is bigger than you ever thought, and you can be whoever you want to be in it. Now that's freedom.

(more)

WISE (cont'd)

We've got to stop thinking, it's about us and them. We need to start thinking about you and me. We need to help each other to stay strong so that we can resist becoming who they say we are, who they want us to be. Because that's how they win. We win when we learn how to sing their song better than they sing it. Louder. Sweeter. Because can't nobody argue with what everybody can see. All I'm trying to tell you is that you and I are as good and capable as anybody, we just didn't know it. Every time you pick up a pistol and say, "Gimme what you got!" It means you fell into the trap they laid out for you. Every time you say "I can make 50 dollars in 5 minutes delivering something for homie so why should I go to school?" You proving the people who come up with the statistics right. You on the road to ending up in a church facing the ceiling, or snatching somebody's birthday, that mean it's just a matter of time till you end up in here wearing the blue forever.

(beat)

It mean you weak. It mean you been played. It mean they won. It mean you lost.

(Lights cross,)

SCENE 12

(It's dusk, CLUE is in one section of the yard, clearly strung out. He's humming to himself.)

(WISE goes to the yard. It's getting dark. WISE approaches CLUE.)

WISE

Whuz crackin?

(CLUE is pretty loaded but he knows better than to make any stupid moves. WISE smiles falsely to pretend they're being friendly with each other)

You keep forgetting that they got they pistols but you ain't got yours no more, Youngster. You can kick it on your own, and learn the hard way. I'm offering you a shortcut. It took me 10 years, of bein' in and out of the hole. And in those days, just getting through the night alive was an accomplishment. I was trash at the beat making game, I can't spit like you, that's a talent, and can't most people say they got a hold on words and a beat.

CLUE

You through?

WISE

(Big fake smile towards the gun towers, as he takes CLUE by the arm, holds tight and leads him a little ways. CLUE resists a little at first but goes along.)

One day, I come out of the hole, after some shenanigan done left me almost dead, and my sister come to visit. She say, "You my only brother left, and I don't want to lose you. But you too selfish to care about hurting me." What do you think gon' happen to your brother if something happen to you? You need to be careful.

CLUE

I ain't doin' shit.

WISE

That ain't true, I can see it and smell it. I know you selling, dealing, conning, hustling like you still in the street.

CLUE

I ain't the only one.

WISE

How you conduct yourself ends up in *your* file.
Suppose they decide to transfer you to a level 4.
You want to help your brother? You think you can do
that from a level 4? I'm warning you. You youngsters
don't think about consequences.

CLUE

I ain't even commit the crime they got me in here
for. None of it is straight.

WISE

What? What are you saying?
(he looks around to see if anyone's listening)
Your lawyer know?

CLUE

I told him, he ain't care, and the Judge don't care.

WISE

If it's true, you can fight it. You telling me you
not responsible for the case you caught?

CLUE

No.
(beat)
I'm responsible for something else they ain't got me
for though.

WISE

What?

CLUE

Nothing.

WISE

Tell me so I can figure out how to help you.

CLUE

I'm cool.

WISE

Tell me!

CLUE

Somebody else get bodied on account of me.

(Beat)

WISE

You ain't gotta be alone with this, son. I'ma to try to find you a solution. Stay straight so we can figure out what to do. You hear me? Stayin straight don't mean you soft.

(MCHENRY enters the yard and stands silently counting the geese. WISE spots him.)

You ain't alone.

(WISE walks over to MCHENRY. MCHENRY is startled out of his counting.)

MC HENRY

They came back.

WISE

Yeah, I recognize these guys, but some of their friends ain't come back with them though. There's a bunch missing. Maybe they need a change of scenery. They lucky. Get to come and go at will.

MC HENRY

I guess they do don't they?

WISE

These guys... it's funny, they *choose* to come in here. And they accept us without none of that, "what you in here for?" All they care about is, "You gon' feed us?"

(beat)

I know which of you C.O.'s is gon' to stay, and how you gon handle the job. I ain't been surprised but once. Your Pops fooled me.

MC HENRY

How?

WISE

I knew him from the neighborhood. Same school, and we knew some of the same people. He come in here. Took a job with rules. And I didn't want to take orders from him, so we had an exceptional conflict. I thought one of us was gon' end up killing the other. He was tough, but he was fair.

(beat)

I'm sorry for your loss.

(HE takes his hands slowly out of his pocket to show they're empty, and extends his right hand.)

(Beat. MCHenry does not take his hand.
It's as if he doesn't know whether he
should or shouldn't.)

MC HENRY

Thanks.

WISE

So, is working here your life goal, or you got a
time limit, like you gon work here 10 years, save
some money, then go do something else?

MC HENRY

I guess something else.

WISE

Yeh, most of you start out thinking that way. Your
Pops started out that way too. The ones who make it
are the ones who adhere to the rules, but can also
see that we somebody like yourself who just made a
mistake, end up here.

MC HENRY

You're saying, pretend I'm you or you're me.

WISE

I'm saying, study the pattern. Become the pattern.
Just because you in a position of power, it don't
mean you got to abuse it.
Think of who we are and what someone may be going
through... Think. Take the time to think.

(Lights cross fade)

SCENE 13

(ERNIE is at home. SHE gets up and goes to a drawer, Takes a sealed envelope out, takes a beat before tearing it open, and taking a letter out. She sits back down.)

ERNIE

(Reading)

Office of the Medical Examiner. Case No. M13007529.
Charles Morris, African American, Male, 5 ft 9 inches. 155 pounds. Age at last birthday - 43. Cause of death- Sudden Cardiac Arrest Syndrome. Manner of death- Natural. Decedent's heart stopped suddenly. He lost consciousness and died.

(Phone rings)

Hello.

(WISE is at a phone. THE C.O. is standing by. HE turns away slightly to allow WISE some privacy.)

WISE

(almost whispering)

That you, Ernie?

ERNIE

Wise?

WISE

Yeah, it's me. I can't talk long. C.O. dial from the desk phone. Look, are you okay?

ERNIE

Yes.

WISE

I just want to say that I understand what you was saying to me.

(Beat)

ERNIE

Okay.

(Beat)

WISE

You know how your husband liked to read what you wrote and told you to write to him? You could still write to him but give it to me to read. I'll read it for you, instead of him. Because maybe you don't have somebody waiting to read it and that's why... Because you're a real good writer. I like how you write and you shouldn't stop.

ERNIE

...

WISE

You there?

ERNIE

I am. Yes. Yes.

WISE

I may not be able to give you the same quality of advice that he used to give you but I can try. So just write about anything and give it to me okay?
(beat)
So are you going to write again?

ERNIE

Well, not this minute, but/

WISE

Just try it.

(The C.O. points to his watch.)

(continuing)

You still there?/

ERNIE

/Yes, I'm here. I'm here.

WISE

I gotta go in a second. This is against the rules. I just wanted to check and see if you were doing okay. I didn't like the way we left things.

ERNIE

I'm okay. Thank you for checking... I'll see you on Thursday.

WISE

(He didn't know if he'd ever see her again)
Okay. I'll let you go then. Rest easy.

Thank you. You too.

ERNIE

(HE hangs up. SHE hangs up.)

WISE

(to McHenry)
She'll be here Thursday.

(MCHENRY looks at him like "okay." WISE saunters off with some pep in his step.)

(lights crossfade to)

SCENE 14

(WISE approached CLUE who is in the yard.)

CLUE

*FUCK WITH THE WRONG HOMIE YO,
YOU END UP SIX FEET UNDER EATING DUST BRO
NO MORE MAYONNAISE AND BALONEY SANDWICHES, BRO*

(MCHENRY's entrance can be changed to suit.)

LOUDSPEAKER

Yard recall. Yard Recall.

WISE

(to Clue)

I seen worse than you. I've been worse than you.

(MCHENRY comes out and stands at a distance.)

CLUE

*ME AND MY HOMIES KNOWING WHAT TO DO THOUGH,
WE AIN'T NO SAINTS WE GO HARD IN THE PAINT,
WE MESS YOU UP, YOU TRY TO DUCK, NOW YOU SIX FEET
UNDER EATING DUST, YOU OUT OF LUCK, YOU HORROR
STRUCK/*

(Following overlaps as necessary to depict chaos, and a serious disrespect of MCHENRY by CLUE.)

LOUDSPEAKER

Yard recall. Yard recall.

WISE

(to Clue)

Man, come on. I ain't gon just leave you to stay out here. They jam you up. You don't want to get in no toruble.

(CLUE ignores WISE.)

CLUE

*LIVING THE LIFE INCONSISTENT.
TRYING TO FUCK UP THE SYSTEM*

MC HENRY
It's TIME TO GO! GET OUT OF THE AREA!

CLUE
*FITTIN' TO FLY, SKY'S RESISTANT. BRAVE ENOUGH TO
AIM, NO ASSISTANCE.*

(MCHENRY taps CLUE on the arm.)

MC HENRY
Yard recall. TIME TO GO!

CLUE
Take your hands off me/

WISE
/Don't be stupid, son.

CLUE
(Very Aggressively into McHenry's face.)
*PLAYIN' THE GAME, FROM A DISTANCE, RESISTANCE
RESISTANCE LIVING/ HIS LIFE IN PAIN THAT'S
PERSISTENT, NOTHING TO BRING HIM FAME, IN THIS
INSTANCE.*

(During the above speech, MCHENRY suddenly takes CLUE down so that he's got both hands behind his back. MCHENRY may adlib "Stop. Don't move. Stop moving! Etc..." WISE may adlib "Calm down." CLUE may adlib "Get offa me." He should yell and carry on.)

MC HENRY
(into walkie)
I have a disruptive inmate. Cover me.

VOICE ON WALKIE
Copy.

(CLUE struggles and continues struggling as MCHENRY Straddles him. Searchlights are aimed at them.)

WISE
(to Clue/overlapping)
Don't resist!

MC HENRY
(to WISE)
STAY CLEAR!

(WISE moves away and watches as CLUE struggles.)

CLUE

Get off of me/

(MCHENRY finally gets the cuffs on him. HE pats CLUE down.)

MC HENRY

(into Walkie)
/Got an inmate in restraints.
(to Clue)
Stand up!

WISE

He's going through a lot...Take him to the cage and let him calm down.

MC HENRY

(to Wise)
YOU ARE NOT IN CHARGE, I AM! STAND BACK!
(HE and WISE hold each others gaze for a moment)
(To CLUE, he kicks him.)
I SAID GET UP!
(He kicks him again and again, then catches WISE's eye. WISE has stood back and is watching sadly. MCHENRY, turns back to CLUE and jerks him upright. As CLUE stands)
(into his walkie)
Escorting inmate to TTA!

(The light follows MCHENRY leading CLUE away. WISE stands watching for a long time. Shaking his head sadly, before slowly walking towards his cell block.)

(THE SEQUENCE MAY END HERE or continue with,)

(At the door to the cage, MCHENRY pats CLUE down again, then uncuffs and pushes him in.)

Strip!

(CLUE strips naked and throws his clothes at MCHENRY who cuffs one of CLUE'S wrists to a bar of the cage. MCHENRY checks CLUE's clothes. Throws them back to him. Unlocks the cuff. Locks the cage.

Leaves CLUE in the cage.As CLUE is
pulling on his boxers,)

(Lights crossfade.)

SCENE 15

(ERNIE addresses the audience.)

ERNIE

I don't know if I would have ever started writing if Charlie hadn't nudged it out of me. I do know that it was the combination of him and me, us, that made that happen. When I began to write, it felt like I suddenly knew...who I was. And when he died, I lost the feeling. I didn't think I would ever write again. I didn't think I *could* ever write again. I tried to break the block, but... nothing, So, I emailed my agent to tell her I really wasn't almost finished with the new book. In fact, I hadn't even begun...and she should return the advance and I was quitting. But literally five minutes after emailing her, I check my inbox and see a subject line that says, "Ernie Morris - STATUS APPROVED" I open it, and it says "you have been approved to volunteer at the prison." And I'm like, "Huh?" And then like a dream that you wake up from already forgetting, I remembered that Charlie had applied for us to go there a few days before he died, but not to volunteer. He wanted to photograph the men, and he wanted me to write the bios for the photos. And I had forgotten all about it until this email suddenly appears 3 YEARS later! I jumped up like my laptop was going to explode, because I knew...I knew Charlie was all over it.

(beat)

And so I went to the prison, to follow the thread because I thought it was going to lead me back to him... Somehow. Or that he would find his way back to me... Somehow. When you lose someone, you look for them...Everywhere.

(beat)

I met a man there named James Hakeem Jamerson, also known as Wise, who's serving a life sentence, who reminds me *nothing* of Charlie... Except for...

(beat)

He urged me to write as if it mattered to him.

(Lights crossfade to,)

SCENE 16

(MCHENRY ushers ERNIE in to where WISE IS)

MC HENRY

Hey Wise.

(WISE smiles at ERNIE and as best he can ignores the C.O.)

(MCHENRY turns to leave then turns back to WISE.)

(to WISE)
He's okay.

(WISE is surprised. He nods.)

WISE

Thank you for lettin me know.

(MCHENRY nods back and leaves. ERNIE watches the two of them. WHEN MCHENRY has left, WISE shakes her hand warmly. She returns it. It's the closest thing to hugging, by shaking hands.)

ERNIE

What's going on?

WISE

They got Clue in the hole.

ERNIE

Why?

WISE

He had a bad day and forgot where he was.

ERNIE

How long are they going to keep him there.

WISE

They put you in the hole, they can keep you in there long as they want. Some people stay in the hole, years. I hope they don't transfer him outa here.

ERNIE

Me too. My friend's helping his brother.

WISE

Good.

(beat)

I asked Joan to ask Mrs. Riley if I could talk to her before the Board hearing face to face, but she said, "she don't want to talk to me."

ERNIE

It's good you tried. I'm sorry, Wise.

(beat)

How's your statement coming along?

WISE

I'm working on it.

ERNIE

Is it more than 30 seconds long?

WISE

It's at least a minute.

ERNIE

That's progress. Ideally, it should be somewhere between that and Nelson Mandela's speech in court/

WISE

Nelson Mandela? What d'you mean?

ERNIE

He made a statement at his trial that lasted almost 4 hours, and he ended with, "If needs be, I am prepared to die."

WISE

4 HOURS! And them people let him talk in the courtroom that long? Damn! If I tried that, "I am prepared to die." They'd say, "Yes sir, come right this way."

(THEY laugh)

ERNIE

(beat)

I was wondering, is there any way I could see your cell?

WISE

What do you want to see it for?

ERNIE

I've started writing again.
(he beams)
I'm writing about you.

(Beat)

WISE

(a silent "Wow!")
Let me get one of the C.O.'s to take us.

(MCHENRY and ERNIE stand at the door to the cell. WISE gives the tour of his tiny cell. The cell and bunks should be size proportionate and if possible, not seen until this scene. In the original production there was a chain link fence that suddenly slid open here, to the width of the door revealing to the audience the tiny cell.)

ERNIE

How big is it?

WISE

You mean how small is it? It's about 6 by 9 and a half. I got the bottom bunk. Toilet. Sink.

ERNIE

That's a tiny sink.

WISE

It's big enough to take a birdbath, if I don't want to shower with 13 men at once. Under the bed, those 2 cardboard boxes, I keep all my papers and stuff in that one. That one's my Cellie's. There's a two foot space here between the edge of the bed and the wall so both of us can't fit in here/

MC HENRY

9 PM to 5:30 the rack is locked, there's no way the doors can be opened.

WISE

/comfortable at the same time, I'll step out so you can come in and look around.

(WISE steps out so that ERNIE can step inside.)

MC HENRY

Want me to lock it so you can get the feel?

ERNIE

No No No No No.

(As ERNIE's emotions overwhelm her, SHE heads quickly out the door. SHE begins to run, MCHENRY follows her. WISE stays in his cell.)

MC HENRY

Don't run! NO RUNNING! STOP! STOP!

(she stops)

(into walkie)

Clear!

(to Ernie)

Are you alright?

(SHE shakes her head no. SHE breathes heavily as if short of breath. MCHENRY watches with concern as she tries to regain control.)

ERNIE

How do you do it?

MC HENRY

How do I do what?

ERNIE

How can you lock up all these men in cells like that?

MC HENRY

I'm not the one doing it.

(HE walks away.)

(ERNIE addresses the audience)

ERNIE

We all make mistakes. Some mistakes are worse than others. Some can be taken back, and some can't. But everyone is more than their mistakes. And that's what the system forgets to take into account. That, and the fact that people *can* change. I began writing again as if the fact that I hadn't been able to for over three years was just a comma in a sentence.

(Lights crossfade,)

SCENE 17

(Dusk is falling. The barbed wire shadows fall across the yard. WISE is out in the yard. CLUE comes out. IT's clear he is just out of the hole. He smiles big. HE and WISE exchange a smile. CLUE begins counting the geese.)

CLUE

One, two, three.. four...five, six, seven, eight, nine...

(silently counting then,)
..fifteen, sixteen.

(McHENRY walks out to the yard and begins counting the geese.)

MC HENRY

Three....four....five...seven...eight....nine. ten eleven....fourteen....

(beat)

(to Wise)

Full moon again. I've started noticing, a lot of them come back. They go for a while then they come back. The younger ones. Right now though, looks like the whole crew is here.

WISE

It's a pattern.

MC HENRY

I'm starting to see it now.

WISE

Yeah, every now and then something comes from out of nowhere and disturbs the pattern, but then it goes back to the way it was, but, it never goes back to being exactly the same.

LOUDSPEAKER

Yard recall! Yard recall!

(CLUE leaves. HE nods at the two other men. WISE slowly turns and walks toward his cell block.)

(Lights crossfade to,)

SCENE 18

(WISE speaks in a heartfelt way.)

WISE

Recently, I found out that a volunteer I've been working with at the prison lost her husband 3 years ago. His heart suddenly stopped while she was out one day and he was dead before she got home. Seeing her pain made me understand in a way I never had before, what you must have gone through Mrs. Riley because of me and what I done to you and your daughter. I wish it hadn't taken me 46 years to understand exactly how seriously you've suffered. And I'm sorry that you have had to come to these hearings so many times over the years making you relive the death of your husband over and over.

(beat)

I tried, but I cannot come up with an explanation for why I did what I did that day. There is no good reason for taking somebody's life. I realize now that by the time I was 6 years old and was sent to the Principal's office for cussing at the teacher, Officer Riley was already dead. I didn't know it, and he didn't know it, but I was already on the road headed to killing somebody, or somebody was going to kill me. Causing pain and fear is what I lived for. I hurt so many people in so many ways and I wish I could hit the reset button and go back and change my path now that I know what I know, but I can't. I am sorry for taking the life of your husband, and your father. I can't give him back to you, but if I could, I would. If it meant I had to die myself to give him back to you, I would do that. Please know that I would do that. And I know I can't make amends for it, but what I will never stop doing is trying to teach others not to make the same mistakes I have.

(beat)

I'm not asking you to forgive me, or even to give me another chance, because I know I don't deserve that. What I am asking you to do is to allow me the opportunity to be who I should have been to begin with, and the opportunity to try to stop any young man on the outside from ending up in prison as I did, I would like to do that more than anything. It's the best way I can think of to honor your husband's life, and to give mine some meaning.

(more)

WISE (cont'd)

I will never forget that Officer Riley died and that I am alive. Until I die, I will never stop being sorry that I took him away from you and your daughter. Thank you for taking the time to listen to what I have to say.

(ERNIE steps forward from the shadows where she's listening)

ERNIE

It's perfect.
(beat)
What's wrong?

WISE

It's my fourteenth time and most of us don't get out.

ERNIE

I'll come in every day next week so you can practice.

WISE

No. I just want to sit with what I have now and go in and do my best.

ERNIE

You don't want me to come in to practice with you?

(Beat)

WISE

No. I think it's better if we just wait now till it's over.

(Beat)

ERNIE

You find out on the the same day, right?

WISE

About an hour later.

ERNIE

Can I come?

WISE

They don't let you.

ERNIE

They're going to let you out. I know it.

WISE

You're pretty optimistic ain't you?

ERNIE

Are you kidding, your statement is excellent. So, what's the first thing you want to do when you get out?

(WISE thinks for a minute)

WISE

Take me a bath with bubbles and use a toilet in a bathroom with the door closed. Eat fresh pineapple, and a steak, a baked potato, strawberry milkshake, and maybe some pie and ice cream. Then I'll go for a walk and look at all the people--I don't know them, and they don't know me, but we'll all just be walking down the street.

ERNIE

Maybe you'll meet a nice lady, get married.

WISE

When I walk out these gates, they gon' hand me \$200. You think that's enough to make me a good catch?

ERNIE

I think you are a very good catch. A poor one, but a good one.

(beat)

Are you nervous?

WISE

I'm nervous.

ERNIE

I think you should think positive. I have a really good feeling.

WISE

(gently)

You been coming here for 6 months now and you put in a lot of work with me. And I see how some of the other guys got you helping them too. Thank you. I feel good about what I'm saying for the first time. Ernie, I don't want you to get too disappointed if they don't grant me parole. If I don't walk out of here, it won't be your fault. You try to act tough but you're real sensitive.

ERNIE

Oh, Wise.

(ERNIE hugs him. WISE stands stiffly. Horrified. HE does not hug her back. MCHENRY who came in at some point and has been listening, steps forward.)

WISE

Ernie, stop. Ernie. STOP!

(ERNIE notices MCHENRY.)

ERNIE

I forgot! I'm sorry. It wasn't his fault. I'm sorry. It was just a good luck hug.

MC HENRY

You have got to leave now!

(ERNIE gathers her notebook and pen. As SHE leaves with MCHENRY SHE turns back to look at WISE who stands frozen with no expression.)

(Lights fade,)

ERNIE

WHAT!? Oh my goodness, I am so happy for you! YAY!/
I am so so happy!

WISE

So, I just wanted to say thank you! I couldn't wait
to call and tell you.

ERNIE

I'm so happy I don't know what to say.

WISE

Talk to you soon. Take/

(The call is disconnected. WISE looks
at the phone with disgust.)

(Lights crossfade to,)

SCENE 20

(The sun is shining. WISE carries a duffle bag. The C.O. hands him an envelope.)

MC HENRY

You'll find two hundred dollars in there. I hope I don't ever see you back here.

(WISE nods and puts it in his pocket.)

WISE

You won't.

(As WISE emerges through the gates, the sun brightens and shines into his face momentarily blinding him. He shades his eyes with his hand.)

(HE FREEZES!)

(LONG BEAT)

(ERNIE calmly steps forward.)

ERNIE

I have a tendency to write improbabilities because that could happen. Not impossibilities which can't. I wrote that because more than anything it's what I wished would happen.

(beat)

I wasn't given permission to use Wise's real name, nor the name of the prison, so consider this a work of fiction. But please know that the "real" Wise read and approved everything I've written except for... the end...

(beat)

Maybe my heart isn't as big as it used to be because it broke into too many pieces when Charlie died, or maybe, it's that I know that this improbability is so impossible, even though I want to... so badly, I can't let you think that Wise is out. Because he's not.

(Sound: the slam of the prison gate. WISE unfreezes and retreats back to inside the prison. ERNIE watches him go, then faces the audience again)

(continuing)
This is what really happened.

(into phone) WISE
Ernie.

(Long beat)

(she knows) ERNIE
Wise.

WISE
Not suitable.

ERNIE
I'm sorry/ I'm so sorry.

WISE
/Talk to you later.

(He hangs up.)

(Lights cross fade,)

SCENE 21

(ERNIE enters the prison security area. MCHENRY is there. HE checks her ID. HE stamps her arm. THEY go through the first gate. SLAM. SHE holds up her ID. Goes through the second gate. SLAM.)

ERNIE

How is he?

MC HENRY

Quiet. He's out in the yard.

ERNIE

Thank you for not penalizing me, or him for/the

MC HENRY

Contact violation.

ERNIE

Contact violation.

(MCHENRY nods)

MC HENRY

He's going through it. He's out there. You know how he do. Feeding his geese. Look, I'm not supposed to let you on the yard, but I'm going to give you a few minutes. I'll be nearby.

ERNIE

Thank you.

(In a different part of the yard. IN his own world, CLUE has a notebook and is silently composing a rap, HE nods his head in time to his beat, as he writes.)

(WISE is squatting in the yard, throwing bread to the geese. ERNIE looks at MCHENRY for permission to approach, he nods. SHE approaches WISE.)

Hey.

WISE

Hey. Want some bread?

(HE hands her some. SHE goes to squat next to him.)

Don't squat!

ERNIE

What! Why not?

MC HENRY AND WISE

Over familiarity.

ERNIE

Are you serious?

(McHENRY Shrugs. WISE stands.)

(to McHenry)

Am I allowed to throw the bread?

MC HENRY

Yes, that is allowed.

ERNIE

Thank you.

MC HENRY

You're welcome.

(McHENRY begins silently counting the geese.)

ERNIE

How are you?

WISE

It's not like I've never been through it. But this time I thought...How are you? I was worried about you and all the people who care...

ERNIE

I'm okay.

WISE

They give me 3 years to go before the panel again.

ERNIE

Is that good or bad?

WISE

Could have been five like last time.

ERNIE

I'd like to keep helping you with... that, and your program... if it's okay?

WISE

Do you think you can take it?

ERNIE

If you can, I can.

WISE

Hmph, you calling yourself tough now? You comparing yourself to the Original OG? Okay then.

ERNIE

Okay.

(Beat)

WISE

You still writing?

ERNIE

Yes.

(He beams.)

WISE

Good. You gon' show it to me?

ERNIE

Yes.

WISE

Good.

(After a moment of companionable silence.)

(CLUE continued silently composing his rap, HE nods his head in time to his beat. McHENRY continues clearly if silently counting the geese.)

(WISE suddenly starts singing.)

(singing)
"If it's magic, then why can't it be everlasting?/
(ERNIE has a silent but very big shock and
wonder reaction. WISE keeps singing)
*Like the sun that always shines. Like the poets in
this rhyme. Like the Galaxies of time.*"
(chuckles)

My man Stevie was trying to trip us up with that
first line. Say magic can't be everlasting, and every
single thing he mentions in the song lasts forever.
The magic he talking about is love.

(ERNIE begins to laugh. She finally
understands the gift Charlie left her
with. SHE understands it doesn't matter
the message was lost.)

You tripping?

ERNIE

No I'm okay. I'm okay.

(Beat)

WISE

You still on lockdown?

ERNIE

Yes. But.. the door's unlocked.

WISE

That don't make no sense. It's either locked, or
you're free.

(Beat)

ERNIE

Huh.

(WISE and ERNIE contemplate what he's
said. He may throw out a piece of
bread.)

(Blackout)

(End of Play)